BIRTH

842 847 Except in some of the economically poorest areas any increase of the family was a cause for joy- in the country not just for the immediate family, but for the whole village. However, boys were greatly preferred, especially among the mountaineers, the birth of a girl being something of a disappointment. Among the Kartvelian mountaineers, female infanticide still occurred in the nineteenth century; the Khevsur and Pshav practiced birth control mainly by abortion, no couple being allowed to have their first child until the third year of marriage, the second after seven years, while the third must be the last. During menstruation and childbirth the Khevsur women were considered unclean and were banished to special huts (called samrevlo) outside the village.

841 844

551 The names given to children are now mostly those usual in Christian and Islamic countries, though the older custom of giving animal names to boys and terms of affection to girls has not died out, especially among the highlanders.

8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RHl Caucasia RHl

III. THE FAMILY

Chapter IX

The Offspring

§ 1. CONCEPTION

833 Herodotus has accused the Lesghians of copulating "in public as beasts are wont to do."[1] Such an accusation, however, is absolutely false. Even the slightest sign of affection between husband and wife is tabooed by customary law throughout the Caucasus, except, of course, in strictest secrecy.[2]

Owing to the delicate nature of the subject, very little material has been gathered by the explorers, even though these matters may have a deep sociological significance, as, for example, the extent of birth control, or a psychological and religious significance, such as, for example, the extent of sexual taboos, voluntary abstinence, etc.

841 171 Astoundingly widespread is the taboo of marital intercourse at times of menstruation. A glance at Frazer's or Westermarck's classical works[3] will suffice to convince us of the universality of this prohibition. This same horror of menstruous blood is found in the Caucasus also. However, very little data are at our disposal. We are not told how long these "monthly" periods last, nor the extent of the horror. The Pshavs and the Khevsurs have little stone hovels *(samrevlo)* situated in an open field,[4] (or now usually next to the home),[5] where the unclean woman must stay during her monthly periods. Kovalevskij attributes the practice to Zoroastrianism.[6] He does not seem to be aware that such segregation and "hovels" are found in other parts of the world, where Zoroastrianism has never been known. The fact that the "unclean" woman must wash herself in cow's urine,[7] however, most probably has been taken over from the ancient Iranian religion.

---

[1] Potocki, *Voyage dans les steps d'Astrakhan et du Caucase*, I, p. 240.

[2] Cf. *infra*, pp. 63, 175 f.

[3] Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (abridged), pp. 207—210; 595—607.
Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, I, p. 230.

[4] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 236.

[5] Hahn, *Bilder aus dem Kaukasus*, pp. 72 f.

[6] *Zakon*, I, pp. 98 f.

[7] Cf. *Zakon*, I. pp. 83—122.
The ancient Iranian religion considered cows as sacred animals.

p.138